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TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL MASS VE RS

SUBJECT: MORE RUSSIAN RESISTANCE TO DEMARCHE ON MILITARY SALES TO VENEZUELA

REF: (A) STATE 165022 (B) MOSCOW 11500

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Kirk Augustine,  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Following up our earlier demarche (refs), Political Minister Counselor reiterated U.S. concerns regarding arms sales to Venezuela in a September 13 meeting with Anatoliy Antonov, MFA Director for Disarmament and Security Affairs. Focusing on MANPADS, Antonov replied that the Venezuelan government had not to date requested them. Antonov said that he and his Department's experts had carefully considered the points we had presented and had shared them with Russian services. Antonov noted the MFA would take the U.S. points into account, along with the evaluations of Russian services, when a determination on MANPADS sales to Venezuela was needed.

¶2. (S) Nonetheless, Antonov stressed that there was no international restriction on selling arms, including MANPADS, to Venezuela. Russia also recognized the U.S. as a competitor in the international arms trade, with the motivation of restricting Russia's market access. Russia respected the U.S. right to determine U.S. policy on arms sales to Venezuela, but "that is your decision, not ours; we have our own policy." Antonov said that if U/S Joseph raises this issue with Deputy FM Kislyak, Kislyak "will say the same." PolMinCouns noted that the issue of military sales to Venezuela remained of great concern to the U.S., and this would be a continuing subject of bilateral discussion.

¶3. (S) Regarding sales of AK-103 rifles, Antonov confirmed that the sale was indeed moving forward. He maintained that Venezuela was a legitimate market for Russian arms, and that Russia intends to remain active in this market. He also commented that the tone in parts of ref A points was demeaning to Russia. The U.S. should not "speak to us like we are Gabon or Mali," he remarked. Antonov said that Russia does not and will not give out specific information, such as serial numbers of AK-103 rifles, to others.

¶4. (S) Comment: There was an explicit rejection of the U.S. position with regard to the AK-103 rifles, but a less categorical response on the possibility of a MANPADS sale. While Antonov's general response on arms sales gave little grounds for optimism in the event that Venezuela does request to purchase Russian MANPADS, there may have been enough of a difference in the tone of his remarks on MANPADS to constitute a possible opening that can be further explored.

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